



## **Russell Library Company Mid-Year Meeting**

Tuesday, January 13, 2026 at 6:00pm

In the Hubbard Room at Russell Library: 123 Broad St., Middletown CT

### **DRAFT MINUTES**

- I. Call to Order - The Meeting was called to order by President Wisneski at 6:01 p.m.
- II. Public Comment - There were no comments by members of the public, nor any relevant emails or submissions through the web portal.
- III. Approval of Minutes  
**MOTION:** It was moved (Trustee Hadley) and seconded (Wendy Berling) to approve the minutes of the June 9, 2025 Russell Library Company Meeting. The motion passed unanimously in favor of approving the June 9, 2025 Company Meeting minutes with one abstention.
- IV. Welcome/Opening Remarks
  - A. Eamonn Wisneski, President of the Board of Trustees - President Wisneski expressed his gratitude to the members of the Company for attending this evening's meeting as well as for the Company members who spoke in favor of the library staff contract at December's Common Council meeting.
- V. Mid-Year Updates
  - A. Ramona Burkey, Russell Library Director - Director Burkey shared that the library lost a staff member, Henry Muller, to illness last evening and more information will be forthcoming regarding memorial services. Henry was a beloved member of the library staff and team. Director Burkey distributed the Annual Report to Company members. She shared that the Annual Report shows that library usage continues to grow, with a highlight that children's loans have increased 63.2% since 2018. Patrons who visit the library frequently share with staff

that they come from far and wide due to the programs and resources available at Russell Library. While library usage has increased tremendously, the budget has not increased in line with the cost of inflation. It is essential for the library to target resources under tight budgets.

As of today, there are 764 active children 0 - 5 in Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, which is 40% of eligible children in the city of Middletown. 156 children have also "graduated" from the program by turning 5.

The library soft-launched their door delivery program, averaging about 5-6 deliveries per month. December saw an increase to 10 deliveries. There are currently 5 staff members trained as Notary Publics. Anyone can sign up for free notary services at the library.

*A Christmas Carol* brought in 473 audience members from November to December. The audience members also brought business to downtown Middletown, going to restaurants and stores before and after. The positive spirit of the audiences could be felt, and the library is looking forward to hosting this event again next year.

Giving Tuesday raised over \$5,400, which was a large increase over 2024.

The value of the services offered so far this fiscal year (July 2024 - present) is almost \$3.9 million. There are also many intangible services that are not included in that amount. This is already a positive return on investment for the library's city budget, only halfway through the fiscal year.

Going into the budget season, strategic planning and prioritizing core services is key. The maintenance of the building continues to present concerns, including the HVAC systems.

Looking to the future, it remains to be seen if a library renovation will go to referendum this year. Director Burkey and President Wisneski meet monthly with the mayor and continue to advocate for the future of the library.

The library turns 150 this year! There are many celebrations planned. Saturday, April 11th will be the 150th birthday party. The Russell Library game will debut on that date, encouraging friendly competition throughout the community. The library is collecting memories from the public of Russell Library leading up to the birthday party.

President Wiskneski added that Director Burkey is receiving the United Way 2026 Community Service Award. Congratulations and thank you to Director Burkey!

## VI. Committee Updates

A. Executive Committee: E. Wisneski - The Executive Committee met only a few times this year. The former Vice President of the Board of Trustees, Shanay Fulton, is now a member of the Common Council, so Trustee Andrew White has stepped into the role of Vice President.

B. Finance Committee: A. Becker - The Finance Committee looks at the Company Budget and City Budget as part of the budget process. The committee also oversees the Company endowment, which is managed by Essex Financial. A portion of the endowment goes into the Company budget.

*A Christmas Carol* was an additional piece of the budget this year. The costs of the program were about \$10,000 and the program brought in about \$20,000, netting about \$10,000 for the library.

C. Governance Committee: J. Hadley - The Governance Committee works in conjunction with Assistant Director Brandie Doyle. The Governance Committee is looking to potentially add a committee member from the Company if anyone is interested.

This year, a new set of statutory requirements were passed by the Connecticut State Library regarding intellectual freedom and freedom to read. As a result, a number of library policies had to be revised to meet the specifications for language set by the state. The updated policies are posted to the website for full transparency. This spring, the committee will look at the Meeting Room Policy and then move onto other policies.

Company member Jen brought questions about how library policies may address unhoused folks seeking shelter in libraries to ensure the library is a safe and welcoming space. Director Burkey is a member of a city task force working with unsheltered populations. She noted that Middletown has had 5 extreme cold weather events so far this season, which is already more than the 3 total for last winter. This is a stretch on resources for warming centers. The library has policies that address behavior in the library and the library staff is trained in outside resources available for people in need of support, but they are not trained for social work services. Company member Lynn noted that reaching out to local places of worship as allies may help ease some of the financial strain felt across the city.

Wendy Berling highlighted the importance of the intellectual freedom policies in response to book challenges.

The Governance Committee meets every other second Wednesday of the month via Zoom.

D. Strategic Planning Committee: A. White - The Strategic Planning Committee is working to update the current, valid Strategic Plan (written in 2020) to take the library through the next 5 years. The committee is gathering community input to inform the update to the plan. There are 8 guiding questions being asked to individuals and groups. The committee identified community events and gatherings as well as key community stakeholders on whom to focus individual interviews. Professor Mary Alice Haddad's Comparative Urban Policy class at Wesleyan worked in conjunction with the committee. Students in the class interviewed 54 individuals at 11 events during Fall 2025. Committee members and Board volunteers are currently interviewing public officials and other key stakeholders to increase input. The Strategic Planning Committee is looking for Company members' input on the strategic planning survey (survey link on website) and asks members to encourage others in the community to also complete the survey. Empowering youth voices is also important in this process, so it is encouraged to speak to young people about how they would respond to the survey questions. The goal is to release an updated plan by April/May.

VII. Unfinished Business: None

VIII. New Business: None

IX. Adjournment - **MOTION**: It was moved (Cyndi Sanders) and seconded (Diane Santostefano) to adjourn at 6:49 p.m. The motion passed with all in favor.

Attendees:

Ramona Burkey  
Sarah Schulenburg  
Greg Harris  
Carolyn Shaw  
Julia Yulo-Medeiros  
Myke Halpin  
Jennifer Hadley  
Mary Giglio  
Jennifer Kleindienst  
Phil Pessina  
Shawonda Swain  
Ann Percival

Eamonn Wisneski  
Andrew White  
Cyndi Sanders  
Catherine Boone  
Thelma Freeland  
Ayuabat Yaylymova  
Jennifer Jasenski  
Andrew Becker  
Wendy Berling  
Diane Santostefano  
Pierre Sylvain  
Lauri Douglas

Cindy Harrison  
Tommy Russell  
Laura Taft  
Cathy Lechowicz  
Karen Warren

Catskill Howell-Leet  
Tess Goodman  
Charlotte McCord  
Alison Johnson

Respectfully Submitted,

***Sarah Schulenburg***

Sarah Schulenburg, Secretary